

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01

OMB-01 /060 W

----- 090199

R 271546Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2417

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: TORIES WIN WOOLWICH BY-ELECTION

1. TORY CANDIDATE, P. G. BOTTOMLEY, WHO HAS TWICE BEFORE STOOD AS CANDIDATE IN WOOLWICH WEST, WON BY-ELECTION JUNE 26 WITH MAJORITY OF ALMOST 2400 VOTES. OVER 62 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS CAST THEIR BALLOTS AND TORY VICTORY REPRESENTS A SWING FROM LABOR TO CONSERVATIVES OF 7.6 PERCENT.

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2. FORECAST HAD EARLIER BEEN FOR VERY CLOSE VOTE, AND

LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN CAMPAIGNING. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE EIGHT CANDIDATES, BY-ELECTION WAS ESSENTIALLY CONTEST BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LABOR. ALL SIX OTHER CANDIDATES LOST DEPOSITS AND LIBERAL SHOWING WAS PARTICULARLY WEAK.

3. USUAL CAVEATS ON IMPORTANCE OF BY-ELECTIONS APPLY TO WOOLWICH WEST, A CONSTITUENCY WHICH HAS RETURNED PARTY THAT FORMED THE GOVERNMENT IN ALMOST ALL GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR MORE THAN LAST 50 YEARS. WITH THIS RECORD, RESULTS ARE STRONG INDICATION THAT CONSERVATIVES MIGHT BE RETURNED TO POWER IN A GENERAL ELECTION NOW. IN THAT RESPECT, RESULTS ARE HELPFUL TO CONSERVATIVE LEADER, MARGARET THATCHER, WHO PARTICIPATED PERSONALLY IN CAMPAIGN, AND HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO RUNNING CAMPAIGN OF LOW-KEY CRITICISM BY ERSTWHILE HEATH SUPPORTERS.

4. MAJOR ISSUES IN CAMPAIGN REVOLVED AROUND INFLATION, COST OF LIVING, RISING UNEMPLOYMENT, ETC. CONSERVATIVE SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON CONSUMER MATTERS, MRS. SALLY OPPENHEIM, TOLD EMBOFF ON JUNE 25 THAT CONSERVATIVES WOULD WIN IN WOOLWICH BECAUSE VOTERS WERE DISTURBED AT DETERIORATION OF THE NATION'S ECONOMY (MRS. OPPENHEIM ALSO CAMPAIGNED FOR BOTTOMLEY). EVEN SETTLEMENT OF THREATENED RAIL STRIKE DID NOT APPEAR TO HELP LABOR IN THIS COMMUTER COMMUNITY.

5. LABOR PARTY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LOSS OF MARGINAL SEAT IN WOOLWICH SHOULD BE TAKEN AS A WARNING TO THE PARTY TO UNITE BEHIND MANIFESTO POLICIES, BEARING IN MIND SERIOUS ECONOMIC CONDITIONS NATION FACES. IN HIS STATEMENT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PARTY, RON HAYWARD, ALSO NOTED THAT LOSS OF SEAT REDUCED GOVERNMENT'S PAPER MAJORITY TO ONE . (I.E. ABSENTEE PARLIAMENTARIAN STONEHOUSE), BUT NOTED THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO GOVERN SINCE OPPOSITION REMAINS FRAGMENTED AND DIVIDED.

6. ELECTION RESULT WILL ALSO DO NOTHING TO ENCOURAGE PRIME MINISTER TO CREATE FURTHER BY-ELECTION POSSIBILITIES THROUGH ELEVATION TO LORDS OF CABINET MINISTERS
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(E.G. BARBARA CASTLE AND TED SHORT). FURTHERMORE, THE GOVERNMENT WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO AVOID FINAL DECISIONS ON "L'AFFAIRE STONEHOUSE" AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON09945
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750224-0793
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750610/aaaaailn.tel
Line Count: 112
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <23 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TORIES WIN WOOLWICH BY-ELECTION
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, (BOTTOMLEY, P G)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006